

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
INTERVIEW WITH SOUTHERN COMMAND NETWORK
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Q. Can you tell us what your primary goals are and what challenges you expect to face during your term as Secretary of Defense?

A. I have three primary goals. The first is to keep the world from slipping back into the Cold War and the threat of nuclear war again. We have done many things to try to keep that from happening. We sometimes forget how important it is. We have that threat behind us now, we do not want it to reemerge. The second challenge is to keep our forces prepared so they can deal with major regional conflicts and peacekeeping. And the third is to retain a quality, a capability of our forces. We have, I believe, the most capable military forces in the world today and we want to keep them that way.

Q. Here in the field, readiness and quality of life are among our top concerns. What are the funding trends in these areas and are we at risk of returning to the hollow force of the 1970s?

A. Getting back to this third objective, which is maintaining the capability, everything revolves around readiness and quality of life. And so, in order to achieve that third objective, I had to put very great emphasis on maintaining the quality of life for our forces and maintaining the readiness of the forces. Now, we're doing this and we have a challenge in doing this, we're doing this in the face of roughly a forty percent reduction in budget in the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties. And what we have determined as the best way of dealing with this problem is to make first of all a major cut in force structure, which as you all know is underway, nearly completed actually, and so we're reducing the forces by about a third and that is nearly over. The good news is that's nearly over, we have about another year to go, on the force reductions and then we will stabilize and will level at about 1.45 million in the active forces. Now, the savings that that engenders does allow us to maintain high quality forces. The smaller military force, but a very capable and very ready force. And, in fact, in this coming year, fiscal 95, we're actually putting more money in the operation and maintenance account in 95 than we budgeted in 94, even though the forces are somewhat smaller in size and that's precisely because we put a primary emphasis on maintaining readiness. Now, we have also had to have a reduction in the modernization funding. And that is a concern to me because over the long term, if you let modernization go too long, then that starts to affect readiness, five, six, seven years in the future. So we have to get that readiness account back up again and all of the planning is that by two or three years from now we will start increasing the spending and modernization again.

Q. U.S. forces have been heavily committed to peacetime engagement and peacekeeping operations around the world. Do you think this trend will continue, and if so, what are the long term effects of this high deployment rate on the force?

A. Well, we have had a substantial deployment rate of peacekeeping forces involved in humanitarian operations, forces involved in regional stability, in SOUTHCOM in particular, we are deploying forces all the time to countries in Central America and South America. They play a vital role in maintaining the regional stability and promoting democracy in these countries. I do not see a decrease in that deployment and it is a problem because as the force structure goes down, even though we are maintaining the readiness of those units, we have fewer forces to meet these requirements. What we're doing, we're performing very important functions, SOUTHCOM in particular, is performing a vital function in promoting democracy and maintaining stability in this region. But it does take having our forces, not just here in Panama, but in Colombia and Peru and Ecuador and Argentina, Honduras, to all of these deployments continue to take place and that will be a strain. I cannot promise you a relief in that regard.

Q. The period since the end of the Cold War has been a time of rapid change for the military -- downsizing, greater opportunities for women, and greater reliance on technology are examples. What other significant changes do you see ahead for the men and women in the military?

A. Well, there will continue to be more opportunities for women, more jobs open for women that has evolved quite a lot in the last year and there will be more jobs open in the next year. When I leave Panama, I will be going to Honduras and then to Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico, I will take a airplane out to the aircraft carrier, the Eisenhower. And Eisenhower is just going through a shakedown cruise now, but it will, by the time it is fully ready to operate, it will have five hundred women on board. This will be the first significant deployment of women on a large combat ship like the Eisenhower. So that's one example of the kind of changes. In terms of technology - technology is changing rapidly and I think what I would emphasize here is the dramatic changes in computer technology, in digital technology and radio technology which are taking place in the commercial world. What we will be doing in the military is seizing those developments and applying them to military systems. We got the first really significant example of that in Desert Storm. The power of the computer, you might say, in facilitating military operations. And we were making substantial applications of that technology, that new technology in the military forces the rest of this decade.

Q. If you had a chance to review our mission and to meet many of the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines in SOUTHCOM. What thoughts would you like leave us with about what you've seen on this visit and about the importance of our mission?

A. Two related points I'd like to make about that. The first is that I have been enormously impressed with the capability, the enthusiasm, of all of the soldiers, airmen, Navy, Marine people that I have met here. I have seen, I have always believed, that the United States has the best qualified and most capable military force in the world. But it was certainly strongly reinforced in my meetings with the soldiers in this command. I am also greatly impressed with the quality of the leadership in this command. But, if we take that observation, the top quality of the people here, I want to compare that with the

importance of the job that you're doing here. I mentioned that before, but let me come back and be more specific on that. This command has a real-life, everyday mission and it is a mission, first of all, in promoting regional stability, promoting democracy in countries all over Latin America, Central America and South America. And it's doing a really very successful job in that. If you just compare in the last ten years, when more than half of the countries in Central and South America were military dictatorships. Whereas today, they're nearly all democracies. That doesn't mean that there are no critical problems in Central and South America, that means we're making real progress. I believe the U.S. military has played a very important role in that gain. The other thing we're doing here is taking very important actions relative to the counter narcotics traffic. In conjunction with the countries in Central and South America. Both of those missions, as I mentioned before, do require deployment of our forces all over Central and South America. And it has been a very heavy burden on the forces. They have done it wonderfully well. I think I would conclude with two related comments. The first is that I came away very proud of..... the quality and capability of military forces that I have seen in SOUTHCOM. And secondly, I came away very proud of the mission that they're performing and the importance of that, not only to the regional stability here in Central and South America, but for the long term to the national security of the United States.

Thank you.